

**Merrimack Special School Board Meeting
December 8, 2011
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room**

PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Vaillancourt, Vice Chairman Ortega, Board Members Barnes, Markwell, and Thornton, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, Business Administrator Shevenell and members of the Budget Committee

1. Call to Order

Chairman Vaillancourt called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Chairman Vaillancourt highlighted the following School Board meeting dates:

- December 12th at 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall Meeting Room
- December 15th (snow date) at 7:00 p.m. at Merrimack High School in the Cafeteria
- December 19th at 7:30 p.m. at Town Hall Meeting Room
- January 2nd at 7:30 p.m. at Town Hall Meeting Room

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Budget Discussions

• **Food Service**

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the food service program operates on revenue it raises from food service sales and federal reimbursement for meals. The goal of the food service program is to create a surplus or break even at the end of the year. The food service program account had a deficit of \$26,000 in 2009-2010 compared to a surplus of \$93,000 at the end of 2010-2011. Mr. Dziki's cost savings efforts and the modification of lunch prices put the program back on track. Surplus funds are used to purchase expensive food service items.

Food Service Director David Dziki presented the 2012-2013 food service budget. The food service budget includes the purchase of food temperature probes to provide automated daily reports required by state and a price increase to accommodate a federally mandated price increase designed to ensure that paid student meals will cost as much as the federal reimbursement for free meals.

Board Member Barnes questioned why there was a reduction in food costs when the price of quality foods is increasing.

Mr. Dziki responded that he anticipates purchasing less food in 2012-2013 as a result of a decline in student enrollment.

Mr. Dziki clarified that the purchase of food temperature probes would streamline the process of documenting food temperature data required by the federal government.

Board Member Thornton expressed her frustration over the fact that the District has to increase lunch prices in order to equal the cost of reimbursement by the federal government.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she will support the purchase of new food temperature probes because of health and safety reasons.

- **Special Services**

David St. Jean, Director of Special Education presented the proposed 2012-2013 budget for special services. He explained that the special education budget is child specific and is regulated by federal law and state rules and regulations.

Mr. St. Jean reported that the special education enrollment has decreased slightly. The special education enrollment percentage is about the same as the state percentages. He anticipates a decrease in the cost for out-of-district placements and an increase in the cost for related services and equipment required in the students' individual education plans. Transportation costs will increase per the contract with the bus company.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that through the efforts of Mr. St. Jean and his department last year the District received approximately 1.8 million dollars of revenue from federal resources, 1.2 million dollars from catastrophic aid and one half a million dollars from Medicaid. The amount of revenue is second to Manchester and Nashua School Districts.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Mr. St. Jean to explain catastrophic aide.

Mr. St. Jean stated that catastrophic aide is a funding mechanism from the state of New Hampshire. He explained that the State of New Hampshire funds the cost of educating students above three and one half times (approximately \$44,000) the state average. The state will pay 80% of the cost up to 10 times (approximately \$120,000) the state average.

Mr. St. Jean explained that catastrophic aide reimbursement is received in the budget year after the district incurs the cost. He emphasized that the reimbursement amount was not always at 100%.

Board Member Barnes asked if the district would experience Medicaid cuts similar to the hospitals.

Mr. St. Jean explained that the Medicaid funding through the schools was only available to school districts and any budget cuts would not have a major impact to the budget.

Board Member Barnes questioned why the budget for paraeducators at the James Masticola Upper Elementary School and Merrimack Middle School was higher if there was one less paraeducator at each school.

Mr. St. Jean explained that 2011-2012 budget that was approved by the voters contained one additional paraeducator position at each of the schools. In anticipation of state budget cuts and a decrease in anticipated revenues, the School Board made the decision to eliminate one paraeducator position from each school.

Business Administrator Shevenell added that the difference could represent movement between senior and entry level paraeducators and or an adjusted due to a change in degree status.

Board Member Markwell asked for an explanation of why the budget for the paraeducator salaries has increased 27% in the last seven years.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded the average pay increase for a paraeducator has been between 3% and 4%. A pay increase of four percent compounded over seven years plus, a change in degree status plus general movement could equal 27%.

Board Member Markwell asked if there were plans to offset special education transportation costs.

Mr. St. Jean explained that the District has a negotiated contract with First Student which is out of his ability to change. His department has been known to cost save with other districts when possible. Movement from out-of-district placement to school placement would reduce transportation costs. The increase in the budget is due to an estimated 10% increase in transportation costs next year.

Board Member Markwell reported that year round extended salaries and services has increased 44% over seven years and asked what could be done to offset that cost.

Mr. St. Jean explained that the state regulation for year round extended services changed in 2008 which resulted in more students being eligible for the program.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Mr. St. Jean to provide the board members with a copy of memo #44 from the New Hampshire Department of Education that addressed changes in the year round extended services.

Board Member Markwell asked how many students were placed out of district and to identify the states of placement other than New Hampshire.

Mr. St. Jean reported 43 student out-of-district placements. Eighteen students are transported to Massachusetts for placement and 25 students are placed in New Hampshire.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked Mr. St. Jean to describe the gamut of students that fall under special education categories, how classifications are made and to identify plans which affect costs.

David St. Jean reported that there are 13 different special services categories. If an individual suspects a student has a disability they would make a referral to the special education department. The special education team has 15 days to meet and determine appropriate

testing. The special education team has 45 days to evaluate the student and to file a written report. The team meets to decide if the student has a disability. They have 30 days to create an individual educational plan for the student based on the student's assessment. The individual education plan defines student goals, how the goals will be measured and identifies any accommodations. The team and the parents approve the plan and implementation of the plan.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked what happens if a parent does not agree with the team's recommended plan.

Mr. St. Jean explained that parents would then have a right to request an independent evaluation at the district's expense. Referrals to the District's Special Education Parent Group or the New Hampshire Parent Information Center have been successful in the past. Parents can hire an advocate for their student. Parents can also request a due process hearing at the state level.

Chairman Vaillancourt acknowledged that the special education budget discussion can be frustrating due to the state and federal regulations that result in increased costs to the district. She noted that children and families face great challenges and asked that they be given consideration during the budget process.

- **James Mastricola Elementary School, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, and Thorntons Ferry Elementary School**

Principal Kim Yarlott and Assistant Principal Nick Coler from Reeds Ferry Elementary School; Principal John Fabrizio and Assistant Principal Emilie Carter from James Mastricola Elementary School; and Principal Bridey Bellemare and Assistant Principal Sharon Putney from Thorntons Ferry Elementary School presented the proposed 2012-2013 budgets for the three elementary schools.

Principal Bellemare reported that the three elementary school budgets include the purchase of materials to sustain initiatives in the areas of literacy and math and the purchase of consumable materials to support science and social studies instruction. The elementary school budgets also support a commitment to the five year furniture replacement plans.

Board Member Thornton asked Principal Yarlott to comment on the Reeds Ferry Elementary School parking lot reconfiguration.

Principal Yarlott reported an average of 111 staff members are on site during a typical day. Currently there are 104 parking spaces plus 3 handicapped spaces. She noted one morning this week 96 cars dropped off children between 8:00 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. The parking lot is staffed with three adults who open car doors to facilitate the drop off process.

Board Member Thornton asked if the children being picked up by parents at the end of the day could be directed to another part of the parking lot.

Principal Yarlott responded that the process for releasing a student to an adult at the end of the day is very different than receiving a child from an adult in the morning. All ideas are being considered.

Board Member Barnes asked Principal Yarlott if she had considered a redesign of the library at the same time as the carpet installation.

Principal Yarlott responded that only the library carpet was being considered at this point.

Superintendent Chiafery added that it was her intention to ask the Trustees of the Trust Fund to consider a request to support a library redesign at Reeds Ferry Elementary at a later date.

Board Member Barnes stated that if there were to be a reduction of one first grade teaching position at each elementary school, first grade class sizes would be 20 to 21. She asked the elementary principals for their reaction to larger first grade classes.

Principal Bellemare responded if required, it would be doable, but it is not an ideal situation for the developmental needs of first grade students.

Vice Chairman Ortega referenced the temporary elimination of field trips from the 2011-2012 budget. He asked where the field trips fit into the education process and why field trips made last year's list of items that could potentially be withheld and not this year's list.

Principal Bellemare reported that the assistant principals and the science and social studies facilitators recently reviewed the field trips for consistency between the three elementary schools and the relevance to the curriculum. She explained that the elementary administrators did not support the concept of eliminating the field trips from the 2011-2012 budget because of the valuable connection to the curriculum content.

Principal Bellemare noted that the field trip transportation costs were the only substantial sustainable budget reduction item in the elementary school budgets.

Board Member Markwell noted the similarity between the three elementary school budgets. He asked Principal Fabrizio if the James Masticola Elementary School and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School were sharing resources relative to building efficiency and services.

Principal Fabrizio responded that the two schools do share food service resources, an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher, an Occupational Therapist and a Physical Therapist.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that this is the fourth of a five year furniture replacement plan. She asked if the furniture replacement plan would be completed at the end of the fifth year.

Principal Yarlott felt that it was unlikely that the furniture replacement plan would be completed by the fifth year of the plan due to the modifications over the last two years.

- **Maintenance**

Mr. Touseau reported that the major initiatives in the 2012-2013 budget for maintenance are the abatement of asbestos floor tiles at Merrimack High School, inside security cameras at Merrimack Middle School and an engineering study to provide a secure entrance for James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.

Board Member Barnes asked if in the event the Reeds Ferry library redesign did not occur would the maintenance department be able to improve upon the appearance of the library during the summer months.

Mr. Touseau affirmed that improvement to the appearance of the library would be part of the carpet installation project.

Board Member Barnes stated that she was in support of including the entire cost of the floor cover for the high school gym in the event the high school becomes the sole polling place. If the floor covering is not purchased, she would want that budgeted amount to be returned to the taxpayers as surplus at the end of the budget year.

Board Member Barnes questioned why the estimated budget for gas in the maintenance department had decreased compared to an increase in the estimated gas budget in the food service department budget.

Mr. Touseau explained that his estimated budget for gas was based on a 5% increase.

Business Administrator Shevenell clarified that the food service uses propane gas which is more expensive than natural gas.

Board Member Thornton asked for clarification on the increase in the water and sewer account at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.

Mr. Touseau reported that the budget for water and sewer represents a 17% increase. He explained that some schools incurred water or sewer related repairs. The cost of those repairs was subtracted from the water and sewer budget for some schools. The upper elementary school did not incur any water or sewer repairs and therefore that budget reflects the 17% increase.

Board Member Thornton questioned how the price of \$4.00 per gallon for heating oil was formulated.

Mr. Touseau explained that he multiplied the average number of gallons used per building over the last three years by \$4.00 per gallon.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported a savings of approximately 20,000 gallons of oil as a result of the energy efficiency work by Honeywell after the first year of the program.

Board Member Thornton noted that Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and Merrimack Middle School heat with natural gas. She asked if it was possible to convert the other school to natural gas.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the infrastructure for natural gas was not in place for the schools to tie into the natural gas lines.

Board Member Markwell asked why there was an increase in the rubbish disposal budget.

Mr. Touseau stated that the budget for rubbish is based on the annual bid amount.

Board Member Markwell suggested that Mr. Touseau explore cost estimates associated with rubbish removal by the maintenance department as compared to an annual vendor contract.

Board Member Barnes questioned if the Town of Merrimack would consider the school district as a commercial hauler if the maintenance department were to take the rubbish to the transfer station.

Board Member Markwell questioned the budget for glass and glass replacement.

Mr. Touseau explained that some years there may be more broken glass than others and that glass is one of several items in one line item.

Board Member Markwell requested a break down of the actual money expended from the line item that contains the glass budget.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that historically the oil budget has come in significantly below budgeted. He questioned if the \$4.00 per gallon estimate would result in the same.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that he felt confident that the amount would not exceed the \$4.00 per gallon.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked for clarification with regards to the budgeting process for electricity costs at each school.

Mr. Touseau noted a 1% increase in the budget for electricity.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that it was his understanding that the sole use of a gym floor covering would be to protect the high school gym floor during elections if the high school were to become a polling site.

Mr. Touseau clarified that a new gym floor cover would be used for any activity that might harm the gym floor, such as a winter concert. He explained that a new floor covering would roll out flat and cover the entire gym floor, unlike the current floor cover pieces that have seams and wrinkles that cover just the basketball court. If a new gym floor cover were purchased, the current floor covering pieces would be used at different locations.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted the \$5,000 reduction in overtime expenses in the 2011-2012 budget. She asked if the maintenance overtime account could sustain the same \$5,000 reduction in the 2012-2013 budget.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that he would like to respond to that question at a later time.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted the Superintendent Chiafery did not include the cost of the roof replacement at James Mastricola Elementary School in the operating budget. It was to be a consideration for a warrant article.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Mr. Touseau to speak to the physical state of the James Mastricola Elementary School roof and to explain what would happen if the roof was not repaired.

Mr. Touseau provided the Board members with a map of the roof at James Mastricola Elementary School. He reported the cost of the roof replacement project to be approximately \$615,469.

Mr. Touseau reported that the section of the roof needing replacement has had multiple leaks, contains blisters and bubbles. He reported core samples taken from the roof revealed that the roof insulation is dry; however, the rubber membrane is very brittle and near the end of its life expectancy.

Board Member Barnes noted a section of roof needing replacement was under warranty through 2012. She asked if warranty would cover replacement of that section.

Mr. Touseau responded that the warranty would provide a patch only, not a roof replacement.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that the replacement roof product is very different and of a higher quality than what used in the past.

Mr. Touseau explained that the vendor for the roof product extended the warranty from 25 years to 30 years as a result of the quality of the current product.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that Capital Improvement Plan consists of a roof replacement project every year. She announced her intent to add \$615,469, the cost of the roof replacement project, to the 2012-2013 operating budget. She does not support the roof replacement as a warrant article. She will work with administration to identify areas in the budget that can be reduced to offset the cost of the roof replacement.

4. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There was no public comment on agenda items.

At 9:53 p.m., Board Member Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.